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THE CRAYON.

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W. J. STILLMAN & J. DURAND, EDITORS AND PROPRIETORS.

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AMATEUR CRITICISM.

It is doubtful how far public taste influences the attainment of the artist or his individual excellence, and therefore a matter of doubt if false criticism really injures Art. A genuine Artist will perceive too readily the shallowness and impertinence of ignorant criticism, to be led by it, to the injury of his talent. But the Artist is not all in the matter—he may labor for himself and his own intellectual perfection, but if he does not reach the public, his work is without any result, and as his highest importance is to his own times, so are his life and labors, in great part, wasted, if the taste of his contemporary public shall be so vitiated as to misunderstand or overlook him. The cultivation of taste is not so easy a thing that it may be effected carelessly, nor has taste itself so great native vigor that it can resist false influences, and remain correct in spite of sophisms and prejudices.

In all matters in which men have found by experience that they may be greatly mistaken, they grow timid and distrustful of themselves, and in the same ratio disposed to place trust in those who, by their bearing, manifest a confidence in themselves which the others do not possess. He who "speaks like one having authority" has ever been listened to with respect and deference, until the fallacy of his words has been discovered; while the man who distrusts his own opinion, will scarcely succeed in impressing it upon others. But there are two classes of men who speak as having authority—those who *know* what they speak of, and those who know nothing about their subject, and so speak rashly, not in the slightest degree comprehending the importance of it. They are the two extremes meeting, and they bear so strong a likeness in externals, that it is indeed a difficult matter to distinguish them. Lowell, in one of his recent lectures says: "A distinguished woman (Mrs. Stowe) who has lately published a volume of travels, affirms that it is as easy to judge of painting as of poetry, by instinct. It is as easy. But without reverent study of their works, no instinct is competent to judge of the masters of either Art."

This is true, and if true of poetry, whose realm is mainly in the inner world, where

all human beings of heart live a great portion of their time, how much more evidently must it be true of painting, which has to do with the external world, which so few see justly, and in which so few live any considerable portion of their existence. Yet where we find one person who claims to be a good critic of poetry, we shall find twenty who imagine that they are capable of determining the merits of a work of Art at a glance, and that with a presumption of knowledge that would rebuke an artist who should venture to dissent. We believe that among visitors to the artistic remains of the Old World, the exceptions will be those who modestly confess their ignorance, and consent to be taught. This arrogance, if confined to their own circle of acquaintance, would matter little, since those who knew whether or not they had the faculty of judging, would determine whether or no their judgment was worth anything. But the result of such travels generally is, that a correspondence with some journal at home is established, by means of which all their crude opinions and personal preferences are enforced by all the weight and general character of the journal which, publishing them, seems to endorse them, and so those who have humility enough to learn, are perpetually confused and perplexed by them.

See how this works. A travelling correspondent of an influential paper meets, in some European city, an American artist in whom he becomes personally interested, and, desirous to benefit whom, he forthwith indites a letter full of praises of said artist, and catalogues of fanciful excellences in his works—all done in the kindest feeling, and with a desire to benefit said artist. Wherever the letter reaches it creates a certain impression, for how are the readers to know that the writer is not competent to judge in the premises, and the presumption is generally in favor of his ability to do so. This is all very well for the artist, but how shall his work, devoid of the qualities the fancy of the kind-hearted correspondent invested it with, meet the expectations of those who have formed an ideal from what they heard before they saw it. Searching in vain for what they were assured existed, how shall they come to any other conclusion than that Art is folly, and that "there

is no accounting for tastes!" And so the artist himself is not individually benefited, but is, through his Art, degraded. And this worse than idle puffery goes on constantly, and we are every day informed that some new and astonishing American genius has made its appearance, and is to reform Art—that Mr. —'s last statue is by all odds the noblest work of Art of modern times—that Mr. — has painted a picture which has astonished the cognoscenti of Italy, and from which a glorious rank may be predicted for the artist, &c., &c., through all the ranges and changes of compliment and adulation, until the name of an American artist has almost become a thing to be laughed at by European critics, and American vain glory becomes a thing proverbial.

We wish there were some way of putting an end to it, but we confess we can see none except in the general education of the public in the principles of Art, and this must be the work of years. In the meanwhile, let us assure our countrymen that these amateur critics may be judged by the fluency with which they express their opinions, and the extravagance of their praise, they being generally in direct proportion to their ignorance. We wish that it could be seen that it is for the interest of every artist studying abroad, whose home reputation is of any importance to him, that he should be first judged here by his works, and that any inflation of the public estimation of him must necessarily be followed by a collapse, which shall prove fatal to reputations which might otherwise have been established for ever. We could name one eminent instance of this, in which a reputation, built up by the most systematic newspaper puffing, promises, when it does fall, to destroy even the well-earned honor which would have been permanent.

Letters

ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING.*

NO. VII.

DEAR SIR:—We have seen that of the three primary colors, two are warm and one cold. Whatever connection may be traced between this fact and the attractiveness of their respective qualities, it appears that the general predilection is in favor of the warm in a direct ratio, and justly so, yet I am persuaded that the prevailing fondness for warm color is often indulged

* Entered according to Act of Congress.